

## Different Trains

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Summary: Dan, Nat, Nan, and Bess leave to pursue their dreams.

## Different Trains

### Different Trains Part 1 -

"Mrs. Jo! Mrs. Jo, come quick!" Nan came running into the house yelling at the top of her lungs.

"Nan, what is it?" Jo came out of the parlor to meet her in the hallway.

"I've been accepted!"

"What?" Jo laughed as Nan threw her arms around her.

"I've been accepted to a medical school in Chicago!" Nan laughed excitedly.

"What?" Jo looked at her in surprise. "Congratulations Nan!"

Nan kept laughing, happier than she had been in a long while. "Mrs. Jo, I can't believe it. I've been waiting for so long that I thought that I wouldn't be accepted. Now that it's actually happened, I . . . I don't know what to do."

Jo laughed and they hugged again. "Nan, I'm so proud of you!"

"What's going on?" Nick asked bringing in an armful of wood.

"Nan has been accepted to a medical school in Chicago."

"Congratulations, Nan. I knew you would." Nick gave her a one-armed

hug.

"It seems that everyone knew except me." Nan muttered softly.

Nick gave Jo a smile and they pretended not to hear.

"When are you going to tell the other?"

Nan tried to contain her excitement. "I'll tell them at dinner . . . if I can wait that long." She ran from the room and they heard her feet pounding up the stairs.

Nick turned to Jo trying to hide his smile, but one look at each other, and they laughed aloud.

"She hasn't changed much has she?" "Oh I think she has, they all have, but in some ways they'll never change. It's who they are."

"That's a good thing, right?" Nick chuckled.

"I think so." Jo went back into the parlor, and Nick headed off in the direction of the kitchen to deliver the wood to Asia.

\*\*\*

Jo looked up from the papers she had been working on to see Dan walk by the room. "Dan?"

He stopped then came into the room. "Yes, Mrs. Jo?"

"Can I speak with you for a minute?"

He nodded slowly. "I guess so. What's up?"

"I'm just working on your diplomas."

He smiled, "You mean I'm not in trouble?"

Jo laughed, "No. I was just -" She hesitated. "What?"

"What last name do you want me to put on your diploma?"

His smile disappeared and he stared at the floor gloomily. When he looked up she could tell he was trying to mask his emotions. "I don't know."

She tried to think of what to say. "Well, . . . how about -" She tried to come up with something. "Why don't we just leave it blank for now? When you decide what last name you want to use, you can always write it in later."

He nodded. "Okay."

She faked a smile. "Great."

"Can I be excused?" Dan asked, standing.

"Of course."

He gave a small smile and headed out the door.

Jo sighed as he left. Then, shaking her head to clear it, she turned her attention back to the diplomas.

\*\*\*

"This is good food, Asia." A new boy named Matt said, with his mouth full. A glance from Jo made him swallow quickly. "My mother would love your chicken!"

"Thank you Matt." Asia smiled.

Jo looked at Nan and raised an eyebrow. Nan looked up and nodded.

"Everyone, Nan has something to tell all of you." Jo called bringing everyone to silence. She sat down and glanced at Nick.

Nan stood up slowly and bit her bottom lip nervously, wondering how everyone would react. "I got a letter today."

When she hesitated, Bess asked, "What is it, Nan?"

It came out in a tumble of words. "I've been accepted to a medical school."

Bess squealed happily and jumped up to hug her. The others began laughing and congratulating her.

"Did you get accepted to the school in Boston?" Nat asked hopefully.

Nan looked away. "No, the school is in Chicago."

He looked at his plate. He would never say it out loud, but suddenly he was really disappointed that she had been accepted at all. "When are you going to leave?"

"Are you excited?"

"Can I help you pack?"

"Where will you stay?"

"Have you ever been to Chicago?"

All the questions quickly distracted Nan, and they sat around for an hour talking about the school. Nobody seemed to notice when Nat quietly left the room.

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"What do you think Nat was so upset about?" Bess asked as she unpinned her hair while getting ready for bed.

"I really don't know." Nan muttered.

Bess was surprised at her tone, but knew better then to comment. Instead, she changed the subject. "What do you think of all the

changes here recently?"

"I think they're running out of room. Matt, Trevor and Corey are sleeping in the barn in Nick's old room, and Brittney, Rachel, Michelle, and Sarah have almost no room to even walk in the Guest Rooms. They'll certainly be glad when we're gone."

"Nick is thinking about building on to the house. He was talking about 3 rooms. One for Asia, one for Mr. Newburn, and another one for the other children."

"That's probably a good idea." Nan mumbled pulling her nightgown on over her head.

"Yeah. You ready for light's out?"

"Uh-huh." Nan jumped into her bed and blew out the lamp.

"Goodnight Nan."

"Goodnight Bess."

Nan couldn't sleep. She stared at the ceiling, wondering what Nat was so upset about. 'I'll have to ask him about it tomorrow.'

Unknown to Nan, Bess was also thinking. 'Everybody know what they're going to do except me. What am \_ I \_ going to do?'

\*\*\*

"Nat! I need to talk to you."

Nat turned to see Nan walking towards him. "Okay."

"I want to know why -"

"Hey Nat. Nick wants us to go out and get ore wood. He said that we're almost out." Dan walked up to them oblivious to the fact that he had interrupted.

"Nan, can we talk later?"

She faked a smile. "Yeah, go ahead."

They hurried off, and Nan groaned. Nat had looked relieved to be interrupted. "If you think you're getting out of this talk," she muttered, \_ "think again."\_ "Nan!" Bess and Sarah ran up to her. "Can you believe that tomorrow is our last day?"

"My father said that most of tomorrow will be spent getting the school room ready for the party on Friday." Sarah smiled. "Have you decided what you're going to do yet, Bess?"

She sighed. "I don't know. I thought that I had decided to go to a school in New York, but they don't have any room for more students."

"What about that private teacher?" Nan asked with interest.

"I don't know, Nan." Bess looked uncomfortable.

"Lets go swimming." Nan said impulsively.

"What?" Bess and Sarah looked surprised.

"Yeah. Lets go ask Mrs. Jo if we can go swimming!"

Bess looked at Sarah who shrugged then smiled. They looked back at Nan, then turned and hurried towards the house.

\*\*\*

Ten minutes later most of the students were swimming in the creek, or talking noisily on the bank.

"Hey Matt, are you gonna get in?"

"Look at me!"

"Bess, watch this."

"Michelle are you going to swim?"

"I can't swim."

"I don't want to get wet!"

"I'm gonna get you for that!" Corey yelled angrily as Rachel had accidentally splashed him.

"Sorry Corey." She grinned teasingly. "You got in the way."

He attempted to splash her back, but the wave went off to the side and hit Trevor instead.

"Hey! Watch what you're doing!"

Nan grinned, "Trev, you're not afraid of a little water are you?"

"No," he smiled back at her. "Are you?"

"No."

He just grinned until a second later when he splashed her.

"Hey, no fair." She looked over at Bess who was laughing at her. "You asked for it!"

Nan splashed Bess, who splashed Corey, who splashed Matt, and soon they were all involved.

Nat and Dan appeared on the bridge and looked down at them in amusement. Nan looked up at them and grinned.

"You guys gonna come in?"

"Un-uh." They backed up a little. "Mrs. Jo wants everyone to come back to Plumfield to get ready for dinner."

"Oh." A few of the kids groaned.

They had almost made it back to Plumfield when Dan stopped and pointed. "Hey Bess, isn't that your parent's carriage?"

She nodded, "Yeah. I wonder what they want."

"They've probably come to take you away again." He teased.

Nan snorted. "The day before we graduate?"

"I wouldn't put it past Mrs. Laurence."

Bess hit his shoulder. "Very funny Dan."

\* \* \*

><p> Part 2 -<p>

"Bess, what happened?" Amy jumped up from her seat as Bess stood soaking wet in the hallway.

"I'm fine mother. We were just swimming."

"Go get changed, dinner is almost ready." Jo said from behind her.

Bess turned and gave her a small smile, then hurried up the stairs followed by the others.

As they entered their room, Nan collapsed on her bed in a fit of laughter. "I thought she was going to have a heart attack."

"You would have been able to save her though, right?" Bess smiled.

"I'm not a doctor yet, Bess."

She giggled, "We'd better get ready."

"Yeah."

Bess looked in the mirror. "What am I going to do with my hair?"

\*\*\*

At dinner all the leaves had been put in the table and it still felt cramped. Jo was sitting at one end with Teddy in a high chair next to her, and Nick sat at the other end. Dan, Nat, Emil, Tommy, Michelle Rachel, Brittney, Matt, Trevor, and Corey sat on one side with Asia, Rob, Stuffy, Myers, Sarah, Nan, Bess, Amy, and Laurie on the other. They had had to rearrange everyone just to make room.

If you tried to move even a little, you were sure to bump somebody or something, and murmured apologies were being said every couple of seconds. For all the people, it was almost silent, as they concentrated on not bumping anything over.

"Mrs. Riley, may I be excused?"

Jo looked up in surprise. Everyone had called her Mrs. Jo for years. Looking over at Nick she saw him with his eyebrows raised. He nodded his head towards Michelle.

"Oh, Yes Michelle, you're excused."

She gave a small smile and disappeared in the direction of her room. Rachel and Tommy visibly relaxed a little and Tommy scooted his chair over for more room.

An hour later they were just finishing dinner.

"Who wants to help me with the dishes?" Asia asked, starting to clear the plates.

Nan gave Bess a look and they both stood. "We will."

Jo stood to object. "You still need to pack. I'm sure someone else can do the dishes tonight."

"Please Aunt Jo." Bess stopped her. "This will probably be the last time we'll be able to do it for a while."

Jo was silent for a minute, then nodded. She slowly walked out of the room with Nick and Teddy following behind.

"Nan, will you grab the rest of the dishes, and Bess will you start wrapping up the left over food?" Asia filled the sink with water and added a little soap.

They hurried to do as she asked, and they were soon in the kitchen talking as they finished.

"You're going to have to teach the new kinds the right way to do the dishes."

"You sure you want to go?" Asia asked.

Bess laughed. "It's someone else's turn!"

Nan grabbed a cloth and began wiping the dishes dry. "You know, this is one thing I definitely won't miss."

"You'll have dishes to do at school, Nan." Asia reminded her.

"But it won't seem like as many." She replied.

Asia shrugged and Bess laughed. "I'll bet you'll miss it."

Nan smiled, "Oh I'm sure I will."

Asia and Bess started talking about the new students, and Nan looked out the window. She was surprised to see Nat standing in the middle of the yard looking up at the stars. She quickly excused herself and headed outside.

It was chilly outside, and there was a soft breeze as she walked towards Nat. Breaking into his thoughts, Nan asked softly, "What are you thinking?"

He looked up startled until he realized who it was. Then he smiled and replied, "I'm not really thinking about anything. I'm just looking at the stars."

She sat down in the grass and looked up. He looked down at her for a second before sitting next to her.

Nan was quiet for a minute, then asked, "Why were yo so upset when I told everyone that I had been accepted to the medical school in Chicago?"

"I wasn't upset, Nan."

"No? You were the only one who didn't congratulate me."

"Congratulations." Nat muttered.

"Very funny." She sighed. "What is bugging you?"

"It's nothing Nan. Really. I'm happy for you."

"You don't sound very happy."

"I was just hoping that you would be accepted to the school in Boston." Nat was surprised when the truth just stumbled out.

"Why?"

"It wouldn't be so lonely if you were around. We won't see each other for two years."

She understood. "It's not like we'll \_ never \_ see each other again. It'll give us something to look forward to."

"Yeah." Nat was quiet for a minute. "I'm going to miss you."

"I'll miss you, too."

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Dan looked out the window. "Somebody's in the field."

Bess appeared behind him and looked out. "It looks like Nat and Nan."

"You want to go out?"

She smiled, "Yeah."

"Lets go."

They quickly walked outside and over to Nat and Nan.

"Want some company?"

They looked up and smiled. "Sure."



"It's tomorrow." Dan said as he sat.

"It's unbelievable." Nan replied.

"When is everybody leaving?" Bess asked.

"I'm leaving on Saturday." Nat took a deep breath. "The Thompson's are giving me a ride to Boston."

"They're going to take me too." Dan said. "I'll catch a train in Boston. I think it leaves at two-thirty in the afternoon."

"My train leaves at five in the evening on Saturday."

Bess looked at Nan and swallowed tears away.

"What about you Bess? When are you gonna leave?"

She gave a small laugh. "I'm still not sure where I'm going yet. I'll have to decide that before I decide when I want to go."

"Am I the only one who's scared?" Nan asked. "I've never been anywhere but Concord and Boston."

"Yeah, but at least you know what you're doing." Dan muttered.

"What? I don't know what I'm doing!"

"Yeah, in a way you do. You'll be going to a school that lots of people go to. I have no idea where I'm going to end up."

"I thought that was what you wanted." Nat stated.

"It is. But it doesn't mean I'm not scared."

"I think we're all scared. To some extent." Bess murmured.

"I know I am." Nat said softly.

"And it's not just being scared of going away." Nan added. "There's also the fear of being a failure."

They all nodded.

"After everything Mrs. Jo's done for us," Dan agreed, "I don't want to let her down."

"Yeah." Nat nodded.

"If she heard us say that, you know what she'd say?" Bess asked.

They all said it at the same time. "As long as you do you're best . . ." "Look at it." Bess motioned towards the house. "Take a good look, and never forget it."

They watched it for a minute, before looking away.

"I wish I had a photo of it." Nan murmured.

That gave Bess an idea. She opened her mouth to speak, but was interrupted when Nick called out from the porch. "Time for Bed!"

They said quick goodnight's and headed for their room's.

"Hey Dan?" Nat asked.

"Yeah?"

He looked about to say something important, then shook his head. "Never mind. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Nat." Dan blew out the lamp in their room and jumped into bed.

"Nan?"

"Yeah, Bess?"

"Would it bother you too much if I kept the lamp light for a while?"

Nan looked intrigued, but didn't ask. "No, go ahead."

"Thanks." Bess watched as Nan got into bed, then turned and sat at her desk. She got out some paper and a pencil and began to draw. .

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\* \* \*

><p> Part 3 -<p>

"Nan! Bess! Time to get up!" Jo called into their room then headed down the hall toward the boys room.

Nan woke up almost immediately and yawned. She looked over at Bess' bed, but it was made and Bess wasn't in it.

"Bess?"

Bess groggily lifter her head from the desk. "I'll blow out the lamp now, Nan."

Nan stifled a giggle. "Bess, it's time to get up."

Bess slowly opened her eyes and glanced towards the window. The sun had begun to hit their window causing the whole room to become light and stuffy.

"Did you sleep there all night?" Nan asked.

Bess looked down at her drawings. "I must have fallen asleep by accident. Look, the lamp is still going."

Nan stood up, then walked over and blew out the lamp. "Come on, we'd better get ready for breakfast or Mrs. Jo'll send the boys again."

Bess smiled at the memory. "Do you think she would?"

"If she didn't, then the boys would volunteer. . ."

\_ "Bess, Nan. Time to get up." Jo called then headed down the hallway.\_

\_ Nan groaned. "I'm too tired."\_

\_ Bess opened her eyes for a second then let them fall shut. "We stayed up too late last night, Nan."\_

\_ Nan just groaned again and pulled the covers over her head.\_

\_ 20 minutes later, if they had been awake, they would have heard feet pounding up the stairs. Dan and Nat knocked, but when there was no reply they threw open the door and found the two fast asleep.\_

\_ "Bess!"\_

\_ "Nan!"\_

\_ They shot to a sitting position.\_

\_ After catching her breath from being startled awake, Nan muttered, "What do you want?"\_

\_ "Mrs. Jo sent us to get you for breakfast."\_

\_ "We'll be down in a minute." Bess muttered.\_

\_ "No, . . . Mrs. Jo says \_ now." \_ Dan pulled Bess out of bed and towards the stairs.\_

\_ "Dan! NO! I'm no dressed! Dan, Stop!"\_

\_ Nan watched as Bess was pulled down the stairs, then took a quick step forward as Nat pushed her from behind.\_

The two burst out laughing.

"I was never so humiliated!" Bess gasped.

"I couldn't believe Mrs. Jo made us spend the whole day in our night clothes." Nan laughed so hard her sides began to hurt.

"And mother had to choose \_ that \_ day to bring father's business associate and his son to visit Plumfield."

Nan had finally controlled her giggles, and took a deep breath. "I can honestly say, that that young man had his eyes on you."

A knock on the door startled them. "You have five minutes!" Jo called.

That only made them laugh harder.

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"I talked to Mr. Newburn before breakfast." Jo interrupted all

conversation around the table as they turned their attention to her. She smiled, "We both agreed that there is no point to having school today."

She waited for the cheering to quiet before continuing. "So instead we're going to spend the day cleaning." She ignore the groans, "and decorating for the graduation party tonight."

"Who all is coming, Mrs. Riley?" Corey asked.

"My parents," Jo replied, "Bess' mother and father, my sister Meg and her family, and Mr. Bridger."

"Oh." He looked thoughtful. "What about Dan, Nat, and Nan's parents?"

An uncomfortable silence lasted a couple of minutes until Dan broke it by saying, "Nat and I don't have parents. They've been gone a long time."

"My father said he'd try and make it back from New York, but 'no promises'." Nan muttered, almost angrily.

"I'm sorry." Corey said softly.

Jo looked at her students with compassion. They had come a long way since arriving, but they all had so much to learn.

\*\*\*

"Has anyone seen Nan? I found some more of her stuff." Bess walked into the boys room carrying jars and papers about bugs.

"I haven't seen her." Emil shrugged.

\_ "What did you say to Aunt Jo?"\_

\_ I just told her the truth," Nan smiled, \*\*"We're like cats and dogs, but that don't mean we can't be friends."\*\*\_

Bess smiled. When she looked over at him, Tommy just shook his head. Bess sighed and left, muttering, "I'm never going to finish packing!"

She passed Dan in the hallway, who gave her a quick smile before heading down the stairs.

"Mrs. Jo, do you want to keep this?" He asked holding up an old experiment they had tried.

She inspected it. "Yeah. Why don't you [put it on one of the shelves next to our library?"

"Okay." He headed for the door.

"Dan," Jo stopped him.

"Yeah?"

"Will you get the book for me while you're out there?" She handed him

a slip of paper.

He took it and barely glanced at it. "So that's why you wanted to keep it."

She shook her head and smiled. "Very funny, Dan."

As he walked over to the library, he quickly found the book, then paused to look at the room. Running his hands over the shelves, he remembered when they had first made them.

\_ "You can never have too many books, Dan."\_

He gasped and spun around looking for whoever said it, but he was still alone. Shaking his head he decided he must be going crazy.

He saw Nan in the back of the school room and decided to go talk to her.

\_ "But it wasn't anything bad. It was just a . . you know, a coma."\_

"I was so stupid." Nan muttered.

"What?" Dan asked.

She spun around. "You scared me!"

"Sorry." He apologized. "What did you say?"

"Nothing'." She smiled and changed the subject. "I'd better go pack."

"I'll walk back with you."

They walked over to the house and Dan went to give Jo the book as Nan headed up the stairs. She passed Nat who was cleaning out a desk in his room.

She stopped for a second. "Having fun?"

Nat looked up and smiled. "Oh yeah."

Nan smiled back then disappeared down the hall.

His smile quickly faded. "I didn't think I had this much stuff."

He started sorting through a pile of papers. "Toss . . . toss . . . toss -" He stopped when he saw a ribbon. The smile slowly returned.

\_ "Here Nat." She handed him the ribbon.\_

\_ "Nan?" He looked at her questioningly. "I can't take it."\_

\_ "You would have beat me anyways," he gave her a look. "Well, no you wouldn't have, but . . I want you to have it."\_

He set the ribbon on his bed. "Keep it."

\*\*\*

"You're graduating tonight." Jo smiled, "Are you ready?"

The four students looked at each other.

"I guess so." Bess finally managed to say. The others slowly nodded.

"I'm so proud of all of you." Jo blinked away tears.

"We both are." Nick corrected.

"I have something for you." Jo pulled out a couple of sealed envelopes. "These are for when you hit an especially hard time in your adventures, when nothing seems to go right, or when you feel especially homesick." She handed them the letters, and they clutched them possessively.

"I'll miss you." Her voice cracked, and tears formed. "Don't forget to write."

Before anyone realized what was happening, they were in a group hug. As Dan looked at everyone, he realized they were all crying.

\*\*\*

By dinner they had all composed themselves and were talking and laughing about what the new students needed to know about the school.

"Don't forget your daily dose of tree climbing." Dan smiled.

"Tommy can teach you how to drop plates." Nat said seriously.

"And how to cut yourself with dinner knives." Nan added.

"Someone needs to get caught daydreaming \_ at least \_ once a week." Bess smiled but nodded seriously at Corey.

The new students looked at each other skeptically.

"I don't believe you." Matt's eyes narrowed.

"No, it's true." Nat insisted.

"It's the unwritten rules." Bess was really serious.

All the kids looked like they were really concentrating and the older students laughed.

"Stop teaching them all your bad habits." Jo grinned. "Besides, it's time for a party. Lets go get these guys graduated."

They quickly got to their feet and headed for the school room.

"Leave the dishes for later." Jo smiled at Asia.

Asia gaped for a minute, then nodded and they started walking side by

side towards the school room.

Nick came up behind them carrying Teddy. He grabbed Jo's hand as they walked. "Ready?"

"I think so."

\* \* \*

Part 4 -

Jo looked out over the small crowd in the schoolroom and took a deep breath. "I had a whole talk prepared, but suddenly I can't remember it."

Laughs tittered around the room.

Jo waited for it to calm down before continuing. "I recently heard someone say, 'Education is about the only thing lying around loose in the in the world, and it's about the only thing a fellow can have as much of as he's willing to haul away'.\* These four students have worked hard, and learned all that I and Plumfield can teach them. But that doesn't mean they know everything. There are many things to learn, even some things that I don't know, and I want you to remember," she said suddenly talking to the graduates, "never stop learning. 'Education is not received. It is achieved.' "\*\*

Dan and Nat smiled at each other, and Nan glanced around the room looking for her father. When she didn't see him, she sighed and turned her attention back to Jo. She didn't see her father quietly slide into the back of the room a second later.

Jo smiled at him, then reached under the desk to pull out a box. "Mr. Bridger was kind enough to help me print up these diplomas. Nan, .  
."

When Nan stood up, Jo handed her the diploma. She smiled and turned around to sit back down. Nan looked back and saw her father standing there. He smiled at her, and she slowly smiled back, then sat down.

"Bess." Jo handed her a diplomas and gave her a hug.

"Dan." He stood and accepted it.

"Thanks Mrs. Jo."

She smiled in reply. "Nat."

Nat stood up wondering how to make this moment last forever. "Thank you Mrs. Jo."

"You're welcome, Nat."

\*\*\*

After they had officially graduated, Nan found a minute to talk to her father. "I thought you weren't coming."

"I wasn't sure I would make it in time." Mr. Harding replied

truthfully.

She didn't know what to say.

"You remember Jake?"

"Your business partner in New York?" She wondered where he was going with the conversation.

"Yes. He became ill this morning, and I spent most of the day with him in the hospital."

He jaw dropped. This was a side of her father that she had never seen before. "Is he okay?"

"Yes. I'm afraid I lost track of time and didn't leave the hospital until 30 minutes after I should have left. I ran the horses most of the way here. I would have never forgiven myself if I had missed tonight."

Nan couldn't believe what she was hearing. She stared at her father trying to figure out if he meant what he was saying. What she saw in his eyes confirmed it and she threw her arms around him.

"I love you, daddy."

"I love you, too."

\*\*\*

Dan watched the exchange between father and daughter from across the room and felt a twinge of loneliness.

"Dan?"

He looked up to see Laurie standing next to him. "Hey, Mr. Laurie."

"My wife and I have a present for you." He handed Dan an envelope.

Looking around the room, Dan saw Amy giving Nat a similar envelope. "What is it?"

"Something that might come in handy." Laurie replied. "All we ask is that you use it wisely."

Dan opened it and gasped. 'There must be a couple hundred dollars here,' he thought to himself.

"Mr. Laurie, I can't accept this."

"Of course you can. You'll only graduate from Plumfield once." With that, he walked away.

Dan shook his head in awe, and looked at the money again. "I can't believe it."

Neither can I." Nat said to his right.



"That makes three of us." Nan smiled.

"Well I certainly wasn't expecting it." Bess broke in.

They all looked at each other and laughed.

"So you've all graduated." Harrison Bridger walked up to them. "How do you feel?"

"Excited." Dan offered.

"Nervous." Nat nodded.

"A little scared." Bess said truthfully.

"But happy." Nan said and they all smiled and nodded.

He talked with them for a few more minutes before announcing that he needed to leave. The other guests slowly filtered out; Laurie and Amy saying that they would be back in the morning, and Mr. Harding saying that he would meet Nan by the train station at 4 the next day."

Soon it was just the students, Jo and Nick who were in the school room. They talked for a while, before Jo announced that a few of them should help Asia with the dishes. Trevor and Sarah volunteered and Matt went along to keep them company.

"Well," Nan said thoughtfully. "I'm going to go back to the house to make sure I've packed everything."

"I'll come with you." Bess said, inviting herself.

Nan nodded. "Okay."

They walked quickly to the house and up to their room.

Looking around, Nan sighed. "Tomorrow night there will be different students living in here."

Bess shrugged. "It's not to room I'll miss. I'll miss you, and our long talks that last all night, I'll miss your pranks, and listening to Nat play the violin, and I'll miss Asia's cooking and Aunt Jo's terrible cookies."

"Don't forget Dan." Nan teased.

"And I'll miss Dan." Bess added, smiling.

Nan closed her last bag, then stared at it in horror. "Oops."

Bess turned from her drawing. "What?"

"I packed my nightclothes."

Bess giggled and asked, "Where did you pack them?"

"I don't remember!" Nan groaned then started opening her bags again.

Bess kept smiling, but turned her attention back to the

drawing.

"Aha!" Nan shouted a couple minutes later, triumphantly holding up the night gown.

"Congratulations." Bess murmured.

"Thank you."

\*\*\*

"Do you think you have everything?" Nat asked.

"I hope so." Dan replied. "I mean, I wouldn't like to get to California and find I'd forgotten my socks."

Nat laughed and threw his pillow at him.

"Hey! It's not Saturday!" Dan protested.

"Who cares?" Nat asked.

Dan laughed and threw the pillow back at him. Then grabbing his own pillow he muttered, "You asked for it."

Nat pretended to be horrified. "Oh no. Not a \_ pillow fight." \_

Dan stepped forward and swung his pillow. Nat ducked and threw his back. Soon they were laughing as they ducked and dodged, threw and swung.

Nan and Bess came over to see what the commotion was and started laughing and cheering them on.

Jo and the others were soon to follow and watched as the two kept fighting. Even Jo had to laugh when Nat ducked under Dan's pillow, swinging his own at the same time, but Dan jumped away landing on his bed just in time.

They were soon exhausted and called a truce falling onto Nat's bed.

The onlookers cheered until Jo announced it was time for bed.

"We have a busy day tomorrow." She said through their groans. "You need your rest."

"Just ten more minutes, Mrs. Jo?" Dan asked with a puppy face.

"Go to bed." She laughed.

"Please?" He pleaded with a smile.

"Ten." She finally relented. "Then I expect the lights to be out!"

She walked down the hallway smiling at the cheers behind her.

\* \* \*

Part 5 -

Bess was the first to wake and she got out of bed and began drawing. About thirty minutes later she was just finishing when Nan woke up.

"Morning." She yawned.

Bess looked back at her. "Did I wake you?"

"No." Nan replied as she got out of bed. "What are you working on?"

"It's nothing really." Bess murmured.

"Oh?" Nan raised her eyebrows in question, but wasn't in the mood to push it.

"I'll tell you later." Bess smiled.

"I wasn't going to say anything!" Nan laughed.

"I know."

There was a brief knock and Dan and Nat entered.

"Would you keep it down?" Dan teased. "You're gonna wake the whole house!"

"Did we really wake you?" Nan asked.

"No." Nat replied. "We were already up."

"We were getting bored by ourselves." Bess smiled and folded a fourth piece of paper. She then turned holding them all. "Here." She handed them each one of the papers, keeping one for herself.

"What is it?" Nat asked.

"Don't open it until you get to where you're going today." She said.

Nan raised her eyebrows in question.

"Being mysterious, Bess?" Dan asked.

She smiled. "Something like that."

\*\*\*

Breakfast was over, and the dishes were done. Amy and Laurie had returned, and Laurie had left taking a load of Bess' things with him. Now they sat in the parlor, nervously waiting for the Thompson's to arrive. Dan started pacing.

"Maybe it would be better if you walked to Boston, Dan." Nat muttered.

"Very funny."

"You're making \_ me \_ nervous, and I'm not going anywhere." Amy murmured.

Dan immediately sat down. "Sorry."

Emil walked into the room and announced, "The Thompson's are here."

Dan and Nat looked at each other and stood. Taking a deep breath they grabbed their bags and headed for the door.

Outside Jo was talking to the Thompson's . "I can't thank you enough for taking them."

Mr. Thopson smiled politely. "It's no problem, Mrs. Riley. We're headed that way anyway."

Nick walked up as Dan put the last bag on the wagon. "Got everything?"

Dan counted the bags then felt in his pocket for the money from Laurie, the letter from Jo, and the gift from Bess. "Yeah, I've got everything. Nat?"

He nodded. "I've got everything."

Nick quickly hugged them both telling them how proud he was of them and to be careful.

Then they turned to Jo who was obviously holding back her emotions. "Be careful, have some great adventures, and write often."

They nodded, and hugged her.

"Okay." She murmured to herself as they stepped back.

Bess impulsively threw her arms around Dan as Nat and Nan did the same.

"Two years isn't so long, right?" He asked not believing himself.

"Right." She lied.

\*\*\*

"You'll write?" Nat asked.

"If you write back." Nan smiled.

"Two years?"

"Two years."

Saying goodbye to the others didn't take very long and they were soon driving down the path . . . away from Plumfield. Dan and Nat only looked back once, trying to memorize everything before they turned forward and looked to the future.

\*\*\*

It wasn't long until they reached Boston. They went to the train depot and got Dan's luggage loaded. The whistle blew telling Dan that it was time to get on board.

They took a deep breath and hugged.

"You ready?" Nat smiled.

"Yeah. I think I am."

"Have fun."

"You too."

"You'll write?"

"I'll let you know where to write back."

"Okay." Nat nodded. The whistle blew again and Dan headed for the stairs.

"See you in two years!" Dan yelled back.

"You'd better be there!" Nat yelled back.

Dan got on and handed the conductor his ticket. He sat in an empty chair next to the window. Then he pulled out the paper Bess had given him and smiled as he looked at the drawing of Plumfield.

This was the start of his adventure, and he had no idea of the struggles he would have the next two years. All he knew was that this was where he wanted to be. . .

\*\*\*

"It's right over there." Nat pointed.

Mr Thompson pulled over to the side of the road then turned to watch Nat gather his stuff. "Do you need any help?"

"Nope. Thanks." Nat grabbed the rest of his stuff and got out of the wagon.

"Have fun." Mrs. Thompson called as they drove off.

Nat walked up the stairs to the building. "Here I go . . ."

\*\*\*

The day seemed to take forever for Nan who was anxious to be off. Finally Jo said that she could load her stuff and she and Bess hurried to do that. They went to town and met her father at the train station.

"I've decided to go along with you, if that's all right."

"What?" Nan wasn't expecting \_ that!\_ "I've decided that it's time I start acting like your father." Mr. Harding smiled.

Nan smiled back and hugged all her 'family' and hesitated when she came to Bess. "I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you too."

"See you later."

"Okay."

Nan turned to Jo and took a second to wipe a stray tear. "Thank you for everything Mrs. Jo. And especially for . . for being like a second mother to me."

Jo hugged her tightly. "You're the daughter I've never had." She whispered. "Be sure to come back soon."

"I will." Nan turned and got on the train.

Bess was about to call after her when Nan turned and yelled, "Don't worry! I'll write!"

Bess watched as the train pulled away. 'The start of an adventure, and I still don't know what I'm going to do.'

"You ready to go home, Bess?"

She turned to her parents. "Yes." Then waving goodbye to her Aunt, they drove home . . .

The End Of The Beginning!

End  
file.